

Reunion/Reintegration

The Challenges and Tools of
Homecoming





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“Deployments are difficult. They bring change, separation, and loneliness. But when the anticipated reunion date finally arrives, many people find themselves overwhelmed with a rush of emotion – relief, hope, anxiety, and even resentment.

Some may fear they have permanently lost a deep connection with their loved ones or that their loved ones have lost intimate desire. Others may fear they have changed so much during the separation that they no longer have anything in common with loved ones.

Soldiers and family members ***MUST*** recognize that reunion is a process that occurs over time. Adjustment depends on length of separation, the ability to communicate and the willingness to accept change.”



Redeployment Readiness

“The process of preparing for the change in habits, lifestyle, behavior, and expectations of loved ones following deployment or separation.”



The Five Phases of Redeployment

- ◆ Pre-entry: includes the days immediately preceding the reunion. This is usually a hectic period when soldiers complete equipment accountability and maintenance, and family members make preparations for their love ones' return.
- ◆ Reunion: is a time of adjustment. It includes the immediate meeting, which may have been rescheduled several times, and ranges from patriotic reunion ceremony to soldiers arriving home individually or unexpectedly in the middle of the night. This phase also includes the first few days after the soldiers arrival and often feels like a honeymoon. This is time to celebrate signs of positive growth in yourself, your partner, and your children.



The Five Phases of Redeployment (cont.)

- ◆ Disruption: occurs as problems surface and expectations of “normalcy” go unmet. Things to expect in this phase include jealousy, new desires for independence, concerns about trust, new routines, the return of unresolved issues and the need for new financial plans. *Help!
- ◆ Communication: is a time of renegotiating new routines, reconnecting, redefining family roles and decision making. *Help!
- ◆ Normalcy: occurs when the family returns to a routine of sharing and caring. Things to accept in this phase are re-established routines and roles, new budgets and personal growth.



Preparing for a Happy Reunion and Moving on to Normalcy

- ◆ Expect doubts and worries; anxiety is normal.
- ◆ FORGET your fantasies about reunion. Take reality one day at a time.
- ◆ Expect change in self/others.
 - Personal tastes, interests, ideas
 - Family roles and responsibilities
 - DON'T try to switch it all back right away, be open to the fact that change may be permanent.



Preparing for a Happy Reunion and Moving on to Normalcy

- ◆ Expect old problems to appear.
- ◆ Share your feelings; communication is key to a healthy reunion. Talk AND Listen.
- ◆ Accept your partner's feelings.
- ◆ Give LOVE. Families may resent the long separation; soldiers may resent that families have coped so well without them. Reassure each other with lots of love and acceptance.




Communication

“Continuous communication during separation plays a critical role in maintaining an emotional bond between partners. Open, two-way communication lines will encourage soldiers and families to start sharing their expectations, concerns and fears about reunion. By communicating these things early, partners can acquire the information and skills needed to cross barriers and minimize problems during reunion.”



Communication

- ◆ The message sent isn't always the message received. Emotion can distort the message, especially if you are angry or upset.
- ◆ Feedback is a critical part of good communication; there must be opportunity for it, and the listener must give it.
- ◆ Verbal and Nonverbal signals communicate. In fact, nonverbal signals are more prominent. You have to listen AND watch to receive the whole message.
- ◆ Men and women sometimes communicate differently. WOW!
- ◆ We sometimes talk or think our way into being angrier than we need to be; we let anger “escalate” unnecessarily.
- ◆ We often make “should” statements, translating preferences (I wish we could....) into demands (we will.....)



Roadblocks to Communication

- ◆ Meaningful communication requires effort.
- ◆ Communication becomes more difficult in the midst of hurt feelings, anxiety, confusion, fear and/or conflict.
- ◆ Poor listening is the primary cause of ineffective communication, the number one roadblock.
- ◆ When both partners listen well, they overcome the most significant roadblock.



Listening Well

◆ Good listeners . . .

- Stop talking and do not interrupt when the other person is speaking;
- Get rid of distractions (TV, radio, newspaper, whatever);
- Make regular eye contact with the person speaking;
- Concentrate on what is being said by the other (not on how to react or defend yourself);
- “Listen between the lines” by paying attention to body language and tone of voice;
- Give reflective feedback on what has been said, thus demonstrating that they have heard accurately.

Giving Feedback

- ◆ When you can say back to the speaker what he/she has just said so that the speaker can say “yes you have understood what I just said,” you have heard the other person.
- ◆ Showing that you have heard the speaker is one of life’s most profound demonstrations of love and acceptance.
- ◆ You don’t have to “agree” to reflect back what you have heard. You may disagree, but the goal is accurate feedback.
- ◆ Giving feedback gives the speaker a chance to recognize that he/she has been misunderstood and that he/she needs to start over and be more clear.
- ◆ The best way to provide reflective feedback is to paraphrase what you have heard (Example: “So, if I understand you correctly, you are concerned about how we have been spending money lately; is that right?”).





Listening and Giving Feedback

“You cannot listen effectively if you are . . .

- ◆ too tired,
- ◆ rushed,
- ◆ do not feel accepting of the other person,
- ◆ drunk or under the influence of alcohol,
- ◆ too angry/frustrated to be rational and open.

Do not try to have a deep and meaningful conversation under these circumstances; wait until later, and set a time (tomorrow evening after supper, over lunch on Monday, or this weekend when the kids are at summer camp, whatever).



Levels of Listening: One Model

- ◆ Level 1

Listening means that when your spouse is talking to you, you are not thinking about what you are going to say when he or she stops. You are thinking about what he/she is saying so that you can reflect it back to them accurately.

- ◆ Level 2

Listening is completely accepting what is being said without judging what is said or how it is said.

- ◆ Level 3

Listening is being able to actually go beyond hearing to repeating back to your spouse what he or she said, and what he or she is feeling (even though you may disagree).



Re-establishing Intimacy and Sex

- ◆ PROCESS!!!!!!! Remember? Take this slowly.
- ◆ First, remember the effects of separation and the natural relational distance that comes from long separation. You can only overcome this by “getting to know each other again.” This can be an adventure or a nightmare; you two get to choose which it will be for you.
- ◆ Barriers to intimate communication and sexual relations:
 - Unrealistic expectations and fantasies;
 - Anxieties regarding engaging in intimacy and sex after the long separation;
 - Fear that your partner has become a stranger;
 - Feelings of anger, hostility, stress, or negative feelings about separation
 - Concern about faithfulness in your relationship (fear or guilt)
 - Going too fast; trying to make up for lost time. Take this slow and easy.
 - Rushing past intimacy straight to sex; intimacy first; then mad, passionate love making. Romance leads to love-making.



Sex and Intimacy

“Because you’ve been apart from each other and have both grown, it will take time to get to know one another again. Partners shouldn’t expect “normal” sexual relations for a few days, and should remember that communication will help bring them closer together. It gives you time to become reacquainted and fosters mutual understanding. Don’t avoid discussing negative feelings and frustrations—admitting them may help put them to rest.”



If Darkness Falls


If you experience any of these . . .

- ◆ Fear of losing your partner,
- ◆ Fear of infidelity,
- ◆ Partner's negative responses are overwhelming to you,
- ◆ Your own anger and frustration at being gone or left behind during deployment makes relationship difficult,
- ◆ Whatever the case may be, HELP is available—accessing it is not weakness, it is strength. You are not in this alone.




Helping Children Adjust

- ◆ Have you been communicating with them? If not, START. This is the emotional preparation for the relationship not only with your spouse but your kids, too.
- ◆ Kids need a “warm up” factor (just like adults), so change must be gradual and gentle.
- ◆ Kids may have a sense of loyalty to the parent/guardian who stayed with them in your absence. Don't take that personally.
- ◆ Just like with spouses, we need to get reacquainted with our children, and this is a PROCESS.




Reactions/Techniques: Birth to 1 Yr

- ◆ Cries, fusses and pulls away
- ◆ Clings to parent or caregiver who stayed behind
- ◆ Changes sleeping and eating habits
- ◆ Does not recognize the returning parent
- ◆ Hold the baby, and hug him/her a lot
- ◆ Bathe and change the baby
- ◆ Feed and play with the baby
- ◆ Relax and be patient—the baby will warm up to you (PROCESS)




Reactions/Techniques: 1-3 Years

- ◆ Shyness
- ◆ Clinging
- ◆ Does not recognize the parent
- ◆ Cries
- ◆ Has temper tantrums
- ◆ Regresses (emotionally; toilet training set backs)
- ◆ Don't force holding, hugging, or kissing
- ◆ Give them space
- ◆ Give them time to warm up
- ◆ Be gentle and fun
- ◆ Sit at their level
- ◆ Don't take "meanness" personally




Reactions/Techniques: 3-5 Years

- ◆ Demonstrates anger
- ◆ Acts out to get the parents' attention
- ◆ Demanding
- ◆ Feels guilty for making the parent go away
- ◆ Talks a lot to bring parent up to date
- ◆ Listen to them (TIME)
- ◆ Accept their feelings (don't take personally)
- ◆ Play with them (at their invitation)
- ◆ Reinforce your love for them
- ◆ Ask about interests; show interest in their world



Reactions/Techniques: 5-12 Years

- ◆ Has fears of inadequacy
- ◆ Dreads the parent's return because of discipline
- ◆ Boasts about the Army and the parent
- ◆ Review pictures, schoolwork, activities, scrap books
- ◆ Praise what they have done
- ◆ Try not to criticize



Reactions/Techniques: 13-18 Years

- ◆ Is excited
- ◆ Feels guilty about not living up to standards
- ◆ Is concerned about rule and responsibilities
- ◆ Unwilling to change plans to accommodate parent
- ◆ Is rebellious
- ◆ Share what has happened with you
- ◆ Listen with undivided attention
- ◆ Don't be judgmental
- ◆ Respect privacy and friends
- ◆ Don't tease about fashion, music, etc.



Combat Stress/Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- ◆ Reactions to time spent in a combat zone vary from person to person based on personality and the nature of the experience.
- ◆ Signs to watch for:
 - Depression
 - Isolation
 - Alienation
 - Avoidance of feelings
 - Rage
 - Anxiety
 - Sleep disturbances
 - Intrusive thoughts
 - Startle response
- ◆ If four or more of these symptoms get in the way of normal functioning or linger beyond a month after leaving the combat zone, it is time to seek help. This will not go away on its own.



Tips for Soldiers

- ◆ Take time to listen and talk to your loved ones.
- ◆ Make separate time for each child and for your spouse.
- ◆ Support the good things your family has done.
- ◆ Don't change systems that have been working well. Don't demand "the way things were done before."
- ◆ Go easy on discipline; don't try to whip things into shape.
- ◆ Remember that romantic conversation leads to intimacy; connect in conversation. Get reacquainted; then "hit the sack."
- ◆ Take a marital-enrichment assessment.
- ◆ Manage money carefully; don't spend yourself into stress and pain.
- ◆ Do not overdo reunion parties. One drunk night can ruin everything.
- ◆ Be prepared to make some adjustments and to change.
- ◆ Expect a little resentment from those left at home.
- ◆ Realize that those at home had a tough time, too.



Tips for Spouses

- ◆ Avoid a busy schedule. Soldiers often look forward to having fewer demands on them after deployment.
- ◆ Plan family time—it helps bring everyone back together. However, don't force the issue; take it easy and build consensus.
- ◆ Make time to be alone and talk with your spouse or partner.
- ◆ Plan special time just for children and the returning parent to get reacquainted.
- ◆ Make adjustments slowly. Don't expect the soldier to do things exactly as before; your spouse has changed and needs to adjust to being home.
- ◆ Expect unusual feelings. The soldier may be hurt by your success without him/her and feel unneeded. Reassure him/her that he/she is loved and needed by the family.
- ◆ Work the newly arrived spouse into the household chores after the initial reunion. Go slow.
- ◆ Stick to your budget and talk about money issues. Remember the pay will decrease after deployment rather significantly.
- ◆ Be patient in rebuilding your relationship. PROCESS!



The Bottom Line

“Reunion is a time to build a stronger family and a stronger life. Use change as opportunity.”



Lessons from the Warrior

"I am an American Soldier.

Ethos

I am a Warrior and a member of a team. I serve the people of the United States and **live the Army Values.**"

Army Values:

- ◆ Loyalty
- ◆ Duty
- ◆ Respect
- ◆ Selfless Service
- ◆ Honor
- ◆ Integrity
- ◆ Personal Courage

Soldiers, you must not forget or marginalize these values!!

This is how soldiers address life, deal with challenges and face temptations to misbehave. **LIVE IT!!!!**



Conclusion

“People with good coping mechanisms usually view change as a hidden opportunity for growth or as a slight disruption to the way things were. A positive approach helps people accept that change has occurred and is a natural part of life. This view mobilizes people into new, healthy ways of thinking, and usually makes the transitions between separation and reunion easier.”